



New Hanover County
Local Watershed Planning Group

MEETING SUMMARY

Wednesday, June 6, 2001 meeting held at the Cape Fear Riverwatch Educational Ctr.

Next Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, July 11, 2001

Meeting Agenda:

- ◆ Update on watershed assessments, Bonnie Duncan, NCWRP
- ◆ Developing a vision and goals for the overall watershed plan

The meeting will be held at the Cape Fear Riverwatch Educational Center from 6:30 p.m.- 8:30 p.m. The public is welcome to observe.

Group Members/alternates present:

Jim Bordeaux, Castle Hayne Steering Committee
David Mayes, City of Wilmington
Stacy Smaltz/ Bouty Baldrige, Cape Fear River Watch
Tommy Tew, Corbett Timber Co.
Michael Pope, Sierra Club, Wrightsboro Community
Karen Moorefield, Carolina Heights Neighborhood
Chris O'Keefe, New Hanover Co. Planning
Dick Loeffert, Northchase HOA

Support staff & guests present:

Suzanne Klimek, NCWRP
Christy Perrin, WECO/NCSU
Scott Pohlman, N.C. Natural Heritage Program
Kevin Schneider, Cape Fear River Watch volunteer, KCI
Andy Wood, Audubon North Carolina
Angie Pennock, USACE
Jay Ure, KCI Associates

Group members absent:

Marian McPhaul, UNCW
Jabe Hardee, Cameron Company
Don Cooke, CP&L
Curt Hensyl, Local watershed resident/ International Paper
Joe Blair, NC Department of Transportation

Natural Heritage Overview of the New Hanover Watershed

Scott Pohlman, N.C. Natural Heritage Program

Scott Pohlman presented the group with information about known significant natural heritage species and sites within the watershed. His presentation is briefly summarized.

What does the Natural Heritage Program do?

The mission is to inventory, catalogue, and facilitate protection of the rarest and most outstanding elements of North Carolina's natural diversity.

The NCNHP, a non-regulatory program, maintains a database of recorded observations of rare, threatened, and endangered plants, animals, and ecosystems/natural communities.

Biological Diversity- the total variety of life and its processes. It exists at three different levels: the total variety represented by all species of plants and animals; the variety of different genes within the species; and the variety of different habitats and ecosystems in which these species exist.

Natural community

- refers to distinct and reoccurring assemblage of populations of plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi naturally associated with each other and their physical environment
- combines biological and physical habitats
- classification is restricted to land in an approximately natural state

Continued on Page 2

How does the program get the data?

- ◆ NCNHP undertakes county inventories, which are conducted by biologists, contractors. Approximately 60 counties have been inventoried so far (not including New Hanover County)
- ◆ Through a network of scientists, museums, the N.C. Division of Water Quality, and others who wish to share information

How are natural areas ranked for significance?

- The NCNHP ranks element occurrences and natural areas based on factors such as rarity, quality, and vulnerability
- Ranked of National, State, Regional and Local Significance (“A,B,C,D”)
- Rating an area as significant does not convey protection- this must voluntarily come from the landowner

What is important in this watershed?

Scott handed out a list of rare and important species and natural communities that have been documented in the watershed. Some important factors in New Hanover County contribute to the types of natural communities found in the area. These include:

- ◆ Sandy soils
- ◆ A water table close to the surface
- ◆ Tidal influence
- ◆ Fire

Fire dependent natural communities:

Several natural communities found in the watershed are dependent upon fire. Without fire, other plant and animal species will outcompete the rare ones in these communities. These include:

- ◆ Peatland Atlantic White Cedar Forest
- ◆ Pine Savanna
- ◆ Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill
- ◆ Pond Pine Flatwoods
- ◆ Wet Pine Flatwoods

◆ Xeric (dry) Sandhill Scrub

This area is remarkably diverse. The watershed still contains some excellent examples of natural areas.

Some examples of species found include the Venus Flytrap, the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, and the Byssus Skipper (a butterfly that depends upon a certain plant species for survival). Some of the rare species in the watershed are dependant on water directly, while others are tied to the water somehow (they may live near water for example). A few species including the Mabee's Salamander and the Black Swamp Snake, have not been seen in 20 years.

The N.E. Cape Fear River is also a great connector to the Holly Shelter Game Lands, a significant natural community (the N.E. Cape Fear River Floodplain is rated as a Nationally significant area).

How can we protect biodiversity?

- Landowner incentives
 - Conservation easements, forest stewardship
- Acquisition
 - State Parks, The Nature Conservancy, NCWRC Gamelands
- Laws
 - Endangered Species Act, Erosion and Sedimentation Control Act, Clean Water Act

Questions for Scott Pohlman:

Q: Where is the Harris Road Savanna- is it visible from the road?

A: It likely is, if it is still there. It contains 3 acres and is on privately owned land.

Q: When was the last time it was observed?

A: Unsure.

Q: Does the Natural Heritage Program work with volunteers?

A: Yes- we have a low budget so we work with landowners and land trusts.

Q: Are there opportunities or amateur naturalists?

Continued on Page 3

A: Need to contact our coastal biologist, Richard LeBlond. Help with a county inventory would be useful if this occurs.

Q: *What does New Hanover County need to do to make an inventory happen?*

A: The NCNHP would need money- the state budget is currently frozen We could possibly match funds and it wouldn't cost much. Our director, Linda Pearsall, would determine the costs.

Q: *What would be the purpose of updating the inventory for New Hanover County?*

A: To look at areas not previously protected and to see if significant areas have changed.

A: *Is the NCNHP a state or federal program?*

Q: It is state funded, although some zoologists are funded by U.S. Fish and Wildlife grants.

Q: *Is the Natural Heritage Trust Fund administered by the N.C. NHP?*

A: No- it's administered by a politically appointed board that meets twice a year to choose sites. Only state agencies can apply, although private groups can partner with agencies. We provide some input into the process by providing rankings of sites.

Conservation Resources in New Hanover County

Chris O'Keefe handed out this report from September, 1984 to the group, and provided large maps of the county that showed where the resources were located. The inventory identified habitats, then matched the habitat with the likelihood of species found within the habitat. Areas are protected with a conservation district overlay to the county's zoning ordinance.

Q: *Is there any enforcement to the conservation overlay district? The USACE marries projects to them.*

A: The Planning Department has an Inspections branch for enforcement. The Sheriff's office helps if needed. Don't have data on enforcement effectiveness.

Wildlife Habitat in New Hanover County

Andy Wood, Audubon Society of North Carolina

Andy Wood shared slides of local wildlife habitat with the group. His slides included pictures of species such as the Bald Cypress, Pond Cypress, and the Prothonotary warbler (swamp canary) He wanted the group to walk away from his presentation with the following points in mind:

- Wildlife is nothing without habitat
- Wildlife species can be viewed as an economic opportunity (tourism generates \$260 million in New Hanover County annually)
- What we have in our backyards is of international importance (for example, the Venus flytrap only found here)
- Concerned that the 1984 county inventory is out of date



Group Provides Input into Stream Segments to be Studied by KCI Associates

Suzanne Klimek shared maps illustrating stream segments that were chosen by KCI for study in the Burnt Mill Creek, Lower Smith Creek, and Prince George's Creek watersheds. She explained that KCI had to move ahead with working in the Burnt Mill Creek Watershed, but asked for feedback from the group on the chosen stream segments. To choose those segments, KCI considered impacts that indicate the potential for restoration. For example, is the channel natural or altered? Is there a buffer left?

The group had the following comments about the stream segments that were chosen:

- Community use should be a criteria for choosing segments

Continued on Page 4

- Publicly-owned property should be explored for restoration potential (including NCDOT property)
- Request that the maps be reproduced for the group members
- A natural heritage inventory would help with choosing locations by allowing an overlay of habitat onto the maps
- Wallace Park is a floodplain and will be re-mapped as floodplain, so it might not have been a good choice had it been chosen. We will likely need to look at the *inputs* to the creek rather than the creek itself
- Burnt Mill Creek (through Wallace Park) is not natural, and possibly could be brought back to normal meander and depth

Have a Happy Independence Day! See you on July 11th!



Action Items:

- ☞ The group would like to hear from NCWRP as to what their limitations are (how much can be done and what resources are available), in order to assist them with developing a vision and goals for the watershed

*For more information about the New Hanover County Local Watershed Planning Group, contact Christy Perrin at (919) 515-4542
email: christy_perrin@ncsu.edu*

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